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## RETIREMENT EDITORS RUNNING SHOW

# Harper's Biding Its Time In Hiring a New Staff

By MARCIA HAYES

Special to The Star

NEW YORK -- Harper's Magazine, limping along under the interim direction of two retired editors and another who has formally resigned, is taking its time replacing the talented staff that walked out in a huff over policy last March.

"We've got a good list of prospects," said William S. Blair, the president and chief executive, who, with publisher John Cowles, will name the magazine's ninth editor-in-chief in 121 years, "and we're moving carefully. What else can I say?"

He would not say who was on the list to replace Willie Morris, who resigned two months ago, followed in close order by some of the best writers ever assembled under one editorial roof. But Blair's reticence was offset by the maelstrom of rumors swirling

through northeastern publishing circles.

The half-dozen editors in Boston and New York asked to speculate anonymously about Morris's eventual successor were garrulous on the subject. Mentioned more than once as prospects were: Bill Moyers, onetime presidential press secretary and former Newsday publisher; Otto Freidrich, former managing editor of the now-defunct Saturday Evening Post; and Jim Thomson of Harvard, an expert on Asian politics.

All three are rumored to have turned down the job, largely because of fierce editorial loyalty to Morris (who is a close friend of Moyers and who serialized part of Frederick's book about the post, "decline and fall," subsequently published by Harper and Row). But also because of potential differences with Blair.

"The kind of men that would be good editorial timber just don't want to take Willie from under him," said one editor, "and no young person



WILLIE MORRIS  
Leaves Editorship

with promise is going to want to put up with the kind of conditions that drove him out."

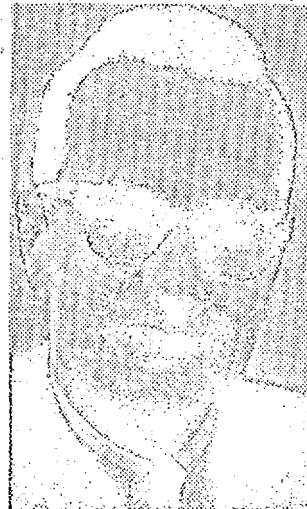
What was the source of the dispute that led to Morris's departure and sparked the later resignations of David Halberstam, Larry King, John Corry, Marshall Frady, Midge Decter and poetry editor John Hollander?

This was also shrouded in conjecture. But the most popular theories were:

-- That Blair, who is a business and advertising man, wanted to change the emphasis of the magazine to a "specialized publication." To illustrate the success such periodicals have had he is said to have mentioned the magazine *ski* -- to the despair of the gathered staff.

-- That the ultra-liberal bias of the magazine, and the literary *Carte Blanche* given to writers like Norman Mailer (who caused a stir when an entire issue was devoted to his "prisoner of sex"), was said to have upset some large institutional advertising accounts. These apparently felt that the articles in the magazine implied criticism of the corporate state -- which, of course,

-- That the editors were enraged to find that Blair and



BILL MOYERS  
Candidate?

Cowles had commissioned pollster Oliver Quayle to do a survey on reader interest, reportedly finding that Harpers did not have widespread national appeal.

-- That the magazine's circulation had dropped to 325,000, putting Harper's neck and neck with its rival, the Atlantic Monthly. And Blair blamed the drop on the magazine's editorial content. The staff countered that the lost circulation was artificial, representing some 100,000 readers inherited from *The Reporter* magazine, which Harper's bought when it folded.

### Ex-Rhodes Scholar

Probably all these factors contributed to the resignations. When Morris, a former Rhodes scholar and muckraking editor of the *Texas Observer*, took over Harper's, he turned it from a rather staid features magazine into a lively meld of superlative fiction, investigative reporting, and probing personal features on regional America.

David Halberstam, former New York Times correspondent and Pulitzer Prize winner, told a reporter for the Saturday



DAVID HALBERSTAM  
Leaves Staff

seven 10,000 word articles and another of 20,000 words--a pretty full schedule.

### Contractual Arrangement

Editors were paid according to a contractual arrangement determined by the number of stories produced and Halberstam calculates that the total editorial costs of the magazine were approximately \$250,000 a year--"or about the salary of one TV news anchorman."

"And," he adds, "there's something wrong there."

After a staff meeting with Cowles at the St. Regis Hotel in New York, Halberstam observed that it was "as though we were talking in English and Cowles was listening in Chinese, or the other way around."

Later, following Morris's resignation (in parting he called Blair "a cloud of doom and pessimism"), the staff tried to hold the magazine together by volunteering to stay on if managing editor Robert Kotlowitz were made editor-in-chief. Blair refused, and the resignations followed.